Jews, especially men, can read, write, and understand Hebrew; but only a small proportion of young people, those educated in Hebrew schools, can speak it. It is doubtful whether all those who, at the Polish census of 1931, declared Hebrew as their mother tongue, did actually use it in daily life. Probably they merely meant thereby to signify their Jewish nationality.[1] Among the Oriental Jews of North Africa and Western Asia many know sufficient Hebrew to make themselves understood, though they chiefly use it as a written language only.

(5) INCIDENCE OF VABIOUS LANGUAGES AMONG THE JEWS

Although the number of Jews speaking Yiddish fell from 7,000,000 in 1900 to 6,800,000 in 1930, or from 60-6 to 42-4 per cent of the Jews, Yiddish still retains the first place among the languages spoken by them.

English comes next. Fifty years ago there were barely 100,000 Jews speaking English, while by 1900 their number had increased to 1,100,000, and by 1930 to 3,700,000; English had thus become the language of 23-3 per cent of the Jews. Moreover some 1,500,000 Jews, who still use Yiddish, live in English-speaking countries, and will change over to English in the next generation.

Polish, which is spoken by 1,000,000 Jews

and occupies the third place, is making rapid progress at the expense of Yiddish, because, under compulsory education in Poland, children give up Yiddish as their language.

[1] The Polish Government stated in reply to a question by the Jewish members of the Seym, in October 1931, that, for purposes of the census, everyone was at liberty to declare as his mother tongue a language which he rarely used, but for which he had a preference; in that sense a declaration of the mother tongue practically amounted to a declaration of nationality.